

State board upholds permit for coal-fired power plant

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A state board backed regulators Wednesday in their decision three years ago to grant a license for a new coal-fired power plant in Sevier County.

The Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club is challenging the permit the Utah Division of Air Quality granted to the Sevier Power Co., which wants to build an electric plant in the rural community of Sigurd.

But the Air Quality Board, acting as adjudicators, five times shot down the Sierra Club's complaints that the permit was based on skimpy data and should have erred more often on the side of public health and the environment.

Board members, over several months, had considered such questions as whether regulators dug deep enough for details about the plant's likely impacts of haze and whether tougher air-quality controls should have been required.

The bottom line: Will the plant be the cleanest possible? The board's answer: The company provided the information Utah regulations required.

Bruce Taylor, an owner of the power company, noted the fight over the plant is not over. "We fully expect to go through the next step," he said, referring to the likelihood of a court appeal after the administrative appeal is made final.

The permit has already survived another administrative challenge to the license, by a local citizens group called Sevier Citizens for Clean Air. But some of those Sevier County critics will stand with the Sierra Club next week in a final administrative hearing, to push for better technology at the plant.

"I'm disappointed," said Sierra Club attorney Joro Walker, "but I'm glad that we got to raise some important issues."

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What's next

The Utah Air Quality Board will meet Monday at 8 a.m. to consider a request by the Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club and a citizens group to require updated, "clean coal" technology for the proposed Sigurd power plant.